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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 000825

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: EQUATORIAL GUINEA: SPANISH MFA ON ALLEGED COUP
PLOT AND INSTABILITY

Classified By: Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Polcouns, per 1.5 (b) and (d).

Summary

11. (C) President Obiang has demanded that Spain extradite to Equatorial Guinea a political opponent who resides in Madrid, Severo Moto, accused of sponsoring an alleged coup plot uncovered this week. MFA has received no official request, and would not transfer Moto if one were received. MFA regards EG as being in a period of heightened instability, with Obiang lashing out at his inner circle as well as the opposition. End Summary.

No Formal Extradition Request Received

12. (C) The Spanish MFA has received no formal request from the Government of Equatorial Guinea for the extradition of EG opposition politician Severo Moto, who resides in Madrid and heads a self-proclaimed EG government in exile. FM Palacio said this publicly on March 9. Ildefonso Castro, Chief of Staff to MFA Secretary of State Gil Casares, confirmed this to us March 10. The EG government claims that Moto was behind an alleged coup plot involving hiring mercenaries to overthrow Obiang and kill his ministers. However, the only EG request for extradition of Moto thus far has come from a radio address from President Obiang in which he called on Spain to extradite Moto to EG or risk harm to relations. Obiang said that "Spain must decide it is with Moto or with Guinea."

GOS Would Not Turn Over Moto

13. (C) Castro noted that the GOS response, as FM Palacio has told the media, is that an extradition has to go through judicial channels. Castro noted that only if the judiciary were favorable would there be a political decision. He did not envision any circumstance under which the GOS would turn Moto over to the Obiang government, since Moto would not face a fair trial. Moto, in comments to the Spanish media, roundly denied any involvement in the plot and claimed it was all an Obiang stunt to discredit the opposition. Moto said that "it is Obiang's modus operandi: he is able to kill people and then to blame us for it."

Conspiracy Theories

14. (C) Castro said it was unclear if the coup plot allegations had validity. He said that the items taken off the plane in Zimbabwe, where 64 supposed coup plotters were intercepted, were not military supplies. He also doubted that such a small number of mercenaries, plus a supposed 15 others on the ground in EG, were credible as a coup force. Castro noted that the plane detained in Zimbabwe came from South Africa, where Obiang recently went on private travel. Speaking personally, Castro speculated that it is possible that during his stay in South Africa, Obiang may have arranged to stage the incident.

15. (U) In comments to the media March 9, FM Palacio distanced Spain from the alleged plot. She said that "From Spain, we can only say that we have warm relations with Guinea and we support constitutional democratic regimes and condemn any attempt to end the democratic order."

A Highly Unstable Situation

16. (C) Castro views the situation in EG as highly unstable. This instability permeates even to Obiang's innermost circle. Castro recounted how in December 2003 Obiang arrested his cousin, Gen. Agustin Ndong, a top associate, for allegedly plotting against him. Castro said that over a hundred other suspects were rounded up in conjunction with Ndong's arrest, most from Obiang's own tribe. (Castro noted that Ndong is now in Spain (Las Palmas, Canaries) for medical treatment after two suicide attempts; the most recent one involved drinking poison which caused severe internal burns.) Castro added that on March 6 the chief of security for the continental region of EG, Nguema Eye (as heard), who was in Obiang's inner circle, died in a traffic accident under mysterious circumstances. Spanish MFA observers suspect that Nguema may have been killed, possibly on Obiang's order.

17. (C) Castro concluded by noting that EG's territorial dispute with Gabon, which affects oil concessions, further adds to the instability. It was unclear, he said, what

France's role in this is. (Spanish media speculate that
France and/or French oil interests may be working to
overthrow Obiang.)
ARGYROS